

Disability Awareness Month

ESSAY CONTEST

Writing is a creative outlet for children as well as adults. Children often express effectively on paper what they have difficulty saying aloud. An essay contest for Disability Awareness Month gives children and youth the opportunity to express their thoughts about disability and how attitudes and actions affect people with disabilities. The essay contest can teach young adults and children that people with disabilities are the same as everyone else.

While there are many types of disabilities, it is important that children of all ages have a general understanding of disabilities and how they should treat people with disabilities. This can be accomplished with discussions, research and activities such as the essay contest.

United Cerebral Palsy of Greater Indiana (UCP) sponsors a yearly statewide essay contest about attitudes toward people with disabilities. You can take part in UCP's essay contest or conduct one of your own. The essay contest sponsored by UCP is open to any elementary or junior high school student in Indiana. Top entrants in each division receive cash prizes presented at a special awards ceremony in March. For more information, contact Donna Roberts, Executive Director of UCP at donnar@ucpaindy.org or (800) 723-7620.

If you would like to conduct your own essay contest, feel free to tailor the UCP guidelines to meet your needs. Here are some suggestions to conduct your own competition.

Guidelines

Limit each child to one essay submission and set an entry deadline. Ask entrants to include a registration form with the entries. (See enclosed form.) These forms can be distributed to schools, libraries, church youth groups, youth organizations such as Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops, and high-traffic stores in your community. You might want to create age divisions to ensure fairness for all entrants (UCP's divisions are grades 3-4, 5-6 and 7-8). Other guidelines, including length, where entries should be submitted and judging criteria need to be established.

Theme

Create a theme for the essay contest. We suggest using UCP's theme, "Attitude." or this year's theme for March Disability Awareness Month.

Content

Give entrants several writing options. For example, UCP's essay contest gives participants three options. Some suggestions include:

- Interview a child or adult with a disability and describe his/her experiences with the attitudes of others.
- Read a book about people with disabilities and describe the impact of attitude on their lives.
- Write about your own observations or feelings about attitudes toward people with disabilities.

Judging

Because different people appreciate different writing styles, select a group of judges from various backgrounds. This mix of styles and tastes will help ensure fairness. Consider teachers, journalists, authors, community leaders, local celebrities, college students, school principals and people with disabilities. Judging criteria might include:

- Use of creativity to project the theme
- Clarity in outlining the theme
- Originality of the essay
- Writing style relative to age of entrant
- Sensitivity of entrant to issues facing people with disabilities
- Knowledge of issues about disabilities

Additional criteria can be used. Criteria can be prioritized, and a point system determined.

Recognizing Participants

We suggest that all participants be recognized for their efforts, whether in a formal awards ceremony, like UCP's, a mailed certificate or an informal gathering. You need to decide on a date, time and location for the awards ceremony or other event where winners will be

recognized. Make sure the site is accessible to people with disabilities. If your organization has Awareness Month activities planned, you might want to tie in the recognition with one of these activities.

Awards

Ribbons, trophies or plaques can be purchased at a trophy store. We suggest giving each participant some type of honorable mention ribbon or certificate.

You could consider getting local businesses involved by asking them to donate prizes or underwrite costs as a corporate sponsor. Requests need to be made well in advance, and a local parent advocacy or disability-related organization might be able to help locate potential sponsors.

Media Relations

Call and request the name(s) of the city editor(s) at your local newspapers and the news director(s) of local radio and TV stations. Send a news release (see enclosed sample) and a PSA (see enclosed sample) announcing the contest one month in advance. Then fax or mail a media advisory (see enclosed sample) to newspaper, radio and TV stations one week before the awards ceremony. Remember to make follow-up calls to ensure the news release/media advisory or PSA has been received, and to express your appreciation in advance for any mentions in the newspaper or on the air. Make sure to track media coverage. Record local newscasts and clip any news articles.

After winners have been announced, send a follow-up news release (see enclosed sample), copies of winning essays and black-and-white photos of the winners to all media that did not attend. Make sure you clearly identify all persons in the photos. Ask local newspapers to reprint winning essays.

Follow-Up

Don't forget to send thank you letters to all who were involved. These letters are extremely important, especially if you are planning to have a similar event in the future.

**DISABILITY AWARENESS MONTH ESSAY CONTEST
REGISTRATION FORM**

Contest Division: _____ Grades 3-4 _____ Grades 5-6 _____ Grades 7-8

Birthdate: ____/____/____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: () _____

I certify that this is my original work (signature): _____

School/Organization: _____

Teacher/Contact: _____

Signature of parent or teacher: _____

(This signature indicates that the signee has read the entry and verifies that it is an original work that has not been plagiarized.)

This form must be attached to entries. It may be duplicated as needed.

All entries should be submitted by (deadline) to:

(Name)

(Title)

(Organization)

(Address)

(SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER)

(Date)

(Mr. John Doe)
(President)
(Organization)
(123 Main Street)
(Anytown, Indiana 46200)

(Dear Mr. Doe:)

Thank you for serving as a judge for our Disability Awareness Month Essay Contest. We appreciate the time and effort you contributed in judging the numerous entries we received. We owe the success of our contest to people like you.

Our goal is to increase local awareness and understanding of people with disabilities. Your participation has helped us work toward that goal.

Thanks once again.

Sincerely,

(Name)
(Title)

(SAMPLE ADVANCE NEWS RELEASE)

For Immediate Release
(Date)

Contact:
(Name)
(Phone)

**(Anytown School Corporation) Sponsoring
Disability Awareness Month Essay Contest**

(Anytown, Ind.) – To celebrate Disability Awareness Month, (Anytown School Corporation) is sponsoring an essay contest about attitudes toward people with disabilities for children in third through eighth grades. The school corporation wants to increase awareness and understanding of some of the important issues facing people with disabilities.

The entry deadline for the essay contest is (Date). Entries will be grouped into several categories based on grade level, and awards will be given to first, second and third place winners in each category. Entries will be judged by several local celebrities, including (names). An awards ceremony/recognition luncheon honoring all participants will be held at (Time) on (Date) at (Name and address)

The contest is open to any (Anytown) third through eighth grader. Only one entry per participant will be accepted. Entry forms are available at all (Anytown schools) or at (Names and addresses of other places they are available).

“We are extremely excited about the contest,” said (Name), contest coordinator. “We want children to understand that people with disabilities are like everyone else – they are people first. The contest will allow our children to serve as advocates for disabilities awareness.”

For more information on the essay contest, call (Contact name and phone number).

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(SAMPLE RADIO PSA)

Contact:

(Name)

(Phone)

Start: March ____ , 20____

Stop: March ____ , 20____

TIME: 20 seconds

“ESSAY CONTEST”

ANNOUNCER

TO CELEBRATE DISABILITY AWARENESS
MONTH, (ANYTOWN SCHOOL
CORPORATION) IS SPONSORING AN
ESSAY CONTEST. THE FREE CONTEST IS
OPEN TO ALL STUDENTS IN THIRD
THROUGH EIGHTH GRADES WHO LIVE IN
(ANYTOWN), AND AWARDS WILL BE
GIVEN TO THE TOP THREE ENTRIES
IN EACH AGE GROUP. ENTRY FORMS
ARE AVAILABLE AT (ANYTOWN SCHOOL
CORPORATION) AND (NAMES OF
OTHER PLACES THEY ARE AVAILABLE).

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(SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY)

For Immediate Release
(Date)

Contact:
(Name)
(Phone)

MEDIA ADVISORY

What Disability Awareness Month Essay Contest and Awards Ceremony/Recognition Luncheon

To celebrate Disability Awareness Month, the (Anytown School Corporation) sponsored an essay contest for all third- through eighth-grade students in the city. The theme, "Attitudes," asked students to explore attitudes toward people with disabilities.

Who Corporate sponsors, contributors, local celebrity judges and presenters (names of those who are recognizable) will attend the awards ceremony.

When (Date)
(Time)

Where (Location)
(Address)

How Entries were placed in categories based on grade level and were judged by area celebrities and officials. First, second and third place awards will be given in each category.

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(SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP NEWS RELEASE)

For Immediate Release
(Date)

Contact:
(Name)
(Phone)

(Anytown) Students Selected as Essay Contest Winners

(Anytown, Ind.) – (Name of the local celebrity who presented the awards) presented awards to several young writers for their participation in the (Anytown School Corporation’s) Disability Awareness Month Essay Contest.

More than (number) students in third through eighth grades submitted entries for the essay contest about people with disabilities. The contest theme was “(Theme).” Entries were categorized by grade level and judged by local celebrities and officials, including (Names).

Winners in the third and fourth grades category were 1st: (Name and school/organization), 2nd: (Name and school/organization) and 3rd: (Name and school/organization). Winners from the fifth and sixth grades were: (Names and schools/organizations). In seventh and eighth grades, the winners were (Names and schools/organizations).

First, second and third place winners in each category received (Prizes), and all participants received honorable mention ribbons.

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ESSAY CONTEST TIMELINE CHECKLIST

* * This timeline checklist should be adjusted according to your specific planning time frame.

Six weeks before the essay contest awards ceremony:

- _____ Develop rules for the contest.
- _____ Choose a theme for the contest.
- _____ Re-type the enclosed registration form or design one of your own.
- _____ Begin working on the awards ceremony. Call local celebrities and officials to ask if they will serve as judges or presenters. Ask local businesses if they will donate prizes for the winners.
- _____ Call local media outlets to get contact names, mailing addresses and fax numbers of editors and news directors that cover this type of event, so you can send them news releases, PSAs and media advisories.

Five weeks before the essay contest awards ceremony:

- _____ Distribute registration forms to area merchants, places of worship, libraries, schools and any other place children frequent.
- _____ Encourage teachers, Girl and Boy Scouts troop leaders, church youth group leaders and anyone else who interacts with groups of children to talk about the essay contest.
- _____ Type the enclosed news release and PSA, or create one of your own, to mail to the media contacts you have established. Send news advisory announcing the contest.

Four weeks before the essay contest awards ceremony:

- _____ Finish up the arrangements for the awards ceremony. You should ask to borrow a podium and microphone from a school if you do not already have these items.

Three weeks before the essay contest awards ceremony:

_____ Call to follow-up on the news releases and PSAs you sent out. Make sure the contact received the news release/PSA and see if more information is needed.

Two weeks before the essay contest awards ceremony:

_____ Entries due.

_____ Confirm your judges for the awards ceremony.

One week before the essay contest awards ceremony:

_____ Gather the judges to meet and make their selections for first, second and third place winners in each category.

_____ Notify the winners and ask that they be present at the awards ceremony.

_____ Type up the enclosed media advisory, or create your own, and mail or fax it to your media contacts.

One day before the essay contest awards ceremony:

_____ Follow-up with your media contacts one more time to encourage them to come to the awards ceremony.

_____ Get the awards ready.

Day of or immediately after the event:

_____ Send follow-up news releases announcing winners.

_____ Mail thank you letters to judges.